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#### Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "New Education dean John Pulliam looks to the future of education" (1982). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 7824. <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases/7824>

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# University of Montana

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## MEDIA RELEASE

brown/rv  
9/28/82  
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### NEW EDUCATION DEAN JOHN PULLIAM LOOKS TO THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

By William Scott Brown  
Office of University Relations  
University of Montana

MISSOULA--

John Pulliam, dean of the University of Montana School of Education, calls himself "an educational futurist."

In explaining what that means Pulliam points out that many of today's children will be functioning in society into the middle of the 21st century.

"Compare them with people who were educated in the last century who are still alive today," says Pulliam, "and you begin to get an idea how inadequate our present education might be. We tend to think of education in terms of the skills we need to survive now."

He points out that the problem will be compounded for today's young people because the rate of technological change continues to accelerate, and he believes that soon "all people in education will have to be futurists."

One practical consequence might be a change from our present model of education with its series of plateaus--grade school, high school, college--to a model that emphasizes lifelong learning.

"Our concern can't be just with training teachers," he says. "We've equated education with teaching for too long. We're going to be in competition with other ways of learning, and we have to be able to compete for the

(over)



Pulliam--add one

attention of the learner. We also have to think in terms of enabling people to learn from sources other than a teacher in school."

As Pulliam develops this line of thought, it becomes clear that he's keenly aware of the impact of the computer age and the rapidly growing use of computers for communication and technical instruction.

Making the point that computerized instruction can be very seductive, he says, "Most kids find it more interesting to play Pac Man than to listen to a teacher in a classroom."

Pulliam's training is as an educational philosopher, but his interest in educational futurism is a result of disaffection for his own field.

"I think educational philosophy is in a bad way," he says. "It is dominated by analytic philosophers who don't shed much light on the path ahead. The futurists were doing that, and it was needed."

Pulliam has co-authored two books on educational futurism, "The Far Side of the Future: Social Problems and Educational Reconstruction" and "Educational Futurism: In Pursuance of Survival." Most of his recent professional articles and speeches have a similar futurist coloration.

But as befits the dean of a large state school of education, his experience and scholarship extend far beyond this single specialty. He is the author of "History of Education in America." He has been on the education faculty of the University of Oklahoma since 1968, a full professor since 1972, and head of the professional degree program in philosophical and historical foundations of education since 1979. He has also taught at the Universities of Illinois and Texas.

In the late '50s and early '60 he was an elementary school teacher, a principal and a superintendent of public schools in Illinois.

This early experience is particularly important in his position as dean of the School of Education since as he points out, "We don't operate in a

(more)



vacuum." He arrived at UM on July 5 and already has begun the process of meeting school district administrators around the state.

Similarly his work in the School of Education has been far more administrative than visionary. He hasn't even broached futurism to the faculty.

"I'm now assessing the weaknesses and strengths of the school. The faculty is good. I need to know what programs are strong and where the weaknesses are."

Giving the school a "futures orientation" remains a long-term goal.

"I think that the school is open to leadership in the futures direction, open to new ideas," says Pulliam, adding quickly, "They don't necessarily have to be my ideas."

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